



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JAN 18 2005

The Honorable Dorcas R. Hardy
Chairman, White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee
Administration on Aging
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Ms. Hardy:

I would like to offer my congratulations for your appointment as the chair of the prestigious White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee. I appreciate the importance of the work of this committee in developing an agenda that will set policy directions for years to come. We at USDA are particularly concerned about the nutritional status and eating practices of the elderly and the impact they have on health.

My staff recently reviewed the draft agenda for the White House Conference on Aging developed by the Policy Committee in October. We are pleased to see the range of important topics it includes. I believe that the Conference could be made even stronger by a adopting a clear focus on food security and nutrition as critical issues facing our seniors, particularly among low-income populations and in rural areas. To that end, I am seeking to involve the Department of Agriculture, the lead Federal agency for nutrition assistance and nutrition promotion, in the development of the Conference and the recommendations it will consider.

Recognizing and meeting the special nutritional needs of older people is an important part of any strategy to promote their independence and improve their health and quality of life. In 2002, more than 19 percent of low-income elderly households were food insecure. In elderly persons, food-insecurity has been linked with significantly lower intakes of key nutrients.

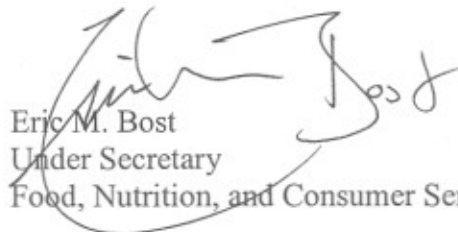
Risks of food insecurity and poor nutrition are particularly acute among low-income seniors who often lack both the resources and the information to acquire and choose a healthy diet. These risks are exacerbated by problems such as a lack of mobility and other barriers to access to nutritious food, particularly in rural areas. Good nutrition, on the other hand, can be cost-effective in maintaining health and quality of life.

While a number and variety of nutrition assistance programs are available to low-income seniors, it is clear that unmet needs remain. For example, eligible elderly persons participate in the Food Stamp Program at lower rates than the general eligible population, for reasons such as perceived lack of need, lack of information, and the stigma of participating. Other programs help to fill the gap by delivering assistance in alternative forms and settings, but these alternatives are not available in every local area or even every State.

We would like to see the Conference consider recommendations that would improve our ability to promote food security, healthy eating and healthy lifestyles among older people. USDA and HHS share responsibilities to provide nutrition guidance and information, including *the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*; these offer one important opportunity to help and support older Americans in making healthful dietary choices. Similarly, the Federal nutrition assistance programs administered by USDA and HHS play a critical role in getting nutritious food to all those who need it, including older Americans.

I look forward to your thoughts on a more active role for USDA in developing Conference agenda items and recommendations. Please feel free to contact me or Dawn Aldridge at 202-720-7711 if more information would be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Eric M. Bost", is written over the typed name and title. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Eric M. Bost
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services